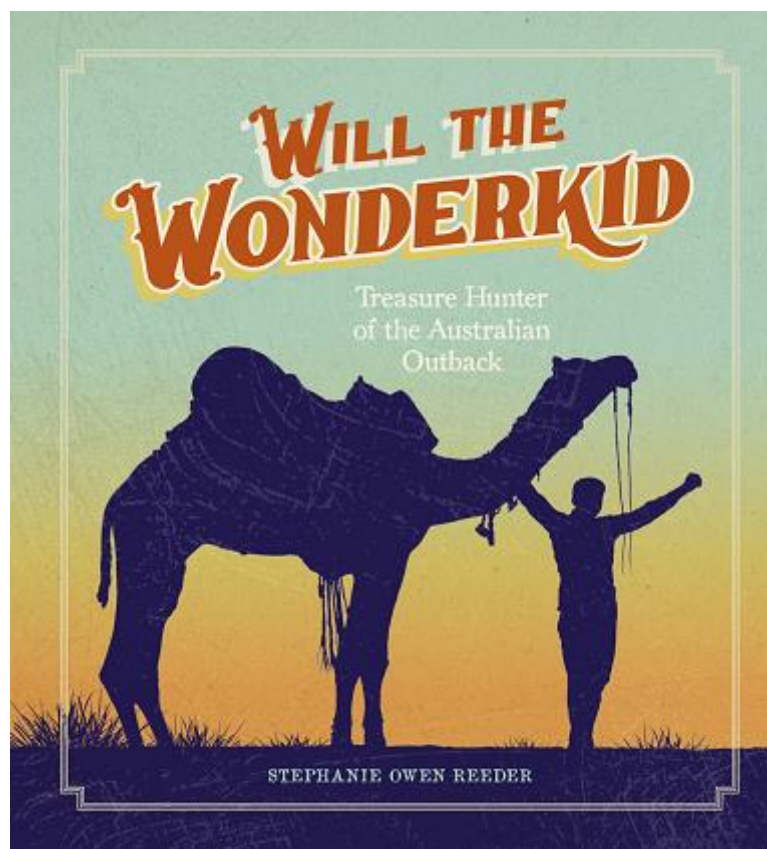


## TEACHERS' NOTES

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**Will the Wonderkid:  
Treasure Hunter of the Australian Outback  
by Stephanie Owen Reeder**



Published by National Library of Australia, February 2020, ISBN 9780642279521  
Recommended Year Levels: Years 4–6

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**Author: Stephanie Owen Reeder** [stephanieowenreeder.com](http://stephanieowenreeder.com)



*Will the Wonderkid* is the latest of Stephanie's award-winning Heritage Heroes series of standalone narrative nonfiction titles. They bring to life true stories about remarkable young Australians from our past. Other titles include *Lost! A True Tale from the Bush* (shortlisted, 2010 CBCA Children's Book of the Year Awards), *Amazing Grace: An Adventure at Sea* (winner, 2012 New South Wales Premier's History Awards) and *Lennie the Legend: Solo to Sydney by Pony* (winner, 2016 CBCA Children's Book of the Year Award for the best information book for children; shortlisted, 2016 New South Wales Premier's History Awards) and *Marvellous Miss May* (shortlisted, 2018 New South Wales Premier's History Awards).

## About the Book

What would you do if you were left alone in the desert with only camels for company?

In December 1914, Australia was suffering from the worst drought in recorded history. But this didn't stop young Will Hutchison—along with three men and six camels—from exploring for gold in outback South Australia. Not surprisingly, both gold and water proved difficult to find.

Finally, in a desperate search for water, the men left Will alone at their remote campsite. Fed up with babysitting camels and fighting off flies, Will headed out into the desert by himself.

Was Will lost forever in the Australian outback? Or did he find the treasure he was searching for? Find out in the fifth book in the award-winning Heritage Heroes Series.

## AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM CONTENT

- Learning Areas
  - HASS (History)
  - HASS (Geography)
  - HASS (Civics and Citizenship)
- General capabilities
  - Critical and creative thinking
  - Intercultural understanding
- Digital Classroom
  - Year 5: [Inland Adventures](#)
  - Year 5: [Frontier Conflict](#)

## Introductory Activities

These are activities to do before reading to prepare students for the concepts/themes explored in the book. They are not necessarily curriculum based.

- Look at the cover of the book with the class and read the blurb on the back cover. What do you think this book will be about? What do you see that makes you say that?
- Discuss the following questions:
  - **Front cover**
    - Where are the boy and his camel?
    - Why would the boy have his arms raised?
  - **Blurb**
    - What would be the reaction in the media today if a teenage boy was part of an expedition exploring for gold in the Australian outback during summer and in the middle of a terrible drought?
    - How would you cope if you were left alone in the middle of the desert without any way to communicate? Discuss this in the context that in 1914 teenagers only a couple of years older than Will went off to fight in the First World War.

## HASS—History

### Year 4

#### Content description:

Sequence information about people's lives and events (ACHASSI076)

#### Elaborations

- Creating a timeline by accurately placing information about key events or people in chronological order and explaining the sequence

#### Activity

- Create two timelines:
  - Outline the major events in Will Hutchison's life, from his birth to his death.
  - Outline the major events in your life, from birth to today.

#### Discussion/Inquiry Questions

- How does your timeline differ from Will's? In what ways was life more difficult for children in the early 1900s than it is today, especially for those living on the land?
- If you could travel back in time to the early 1900s, what would you miss the most about modern life?

### Year 5

#### Content description

Examine different viewpoints on actions, events, issues and phenomena in the past and present ([ACHASSI099](#))

### Elaborations

- analysing sources to identify and understand the different motives and experiences of individuals and groups involved in past or present events and issues (for example, the reasons people migrated to colonial Australia and their diverse experiences; the struggle for rights by emancipated convicts; the way migrants or refugees have been managed over time and their experiences; the motives of whalers and anti-whaling activists)

### Activity

Research the lives of Afghan cameleers in Australia in the early 1900s—use the National Library of Australia’s [Trove](#)

- Afghan cameleers played an important role in helping explorers like Will Hutchison and his father. Divide the class into small groups, and ask each group to research and present five ‘facts’ about the Afghans. Focus on how they survived in Australia and how they were treated by European settlers. Use the following sources to find the facts:
  - contemporary newspapers
  - accounts by people who travelled by camel in the outback in the early 1900s
  - photographs and other images.
- Compare the facts gathered by each group. What are the similarities? Are there any differences or discrepancies?

### Discussion/Inquiry Questions

- How were the Afghan cameleers treated in Australia in the early 1900s? Would they be treated differently in Australian society today?
- Discuss the usefulness of the various sources you used. What information did each source provide, and how can you verify the ‘facts’ they presented?

### Content description

The nature of convict or colonial presence, including the factors that influenced patterns of development, aspects of the daily life of the inhabitants (including Aboriginal Peoples and Torres Strait Islander Peoples) and how the environment changed ([ACHASSK107](#))

### Elaborations

- investigating colonial life to discover what life was like at that time for different inhabitants (for example, a European family and an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander language group, a convict and a free settler, a sugar cane farmer and an indentured labourer) in terms of clothing, diet, leisure, paid and unpaid work, shopping or trade, language, housing and children’s lives
- mapping local, regional and state/territory rural and urban settlement patterns in the 1800s, and noting factors such as geographical features, climate, water resources, the discovery of gold, transport and access to port facilities that shaped these patterns

- discussing challenges experienced by people in the colonial era and the enterprising or sustainable responses made to these challenges (wind energy, food preservation, communication, accessing water)

### Activity

Research the history of one of the towns along the railway line from Adelaide to Hergott Springs (now Marree). Write a history of the town, including the following information:

- who established it
- what sort of people settled there
- where they got their water from
- how they made a living
- what the main buildings in the town were
- how they got food and other supplies
- how people travelled around the area

### Discussion/Inquiry Questions

- How did the harsh desert environment impact on the development of outback townships during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and the lives of the people who lived there?

### Content description

The impact of a significant development or event on an Australian colony ([ACHASSK108](#))

### Elaborations

- investigating an event or development and explaining its economic, social and political impact on a colony (for example, the consequences of frontier conflict events such as the Myall Creek Massacre, the Pinjarra Massacre; the impact of South Sea Islanders on sugar farming and the timber industry; the impact of the Eureka Stockade on the development of democracy; the impact of internal exploration and the advent of rail on the expansion of farming)
- creating 'what if' scenarios by constructing different outcomes for a key event (for example, 'What if Peter Lalor had encouraged gold miners to pay rather than resist licence fees?')

### Activity

Research the history of Coober Pedy.

- How did it develop after Will Hutchison discovered the opal field?
- Create a timeline showing the major developments in the town from 1914 to 2014.

### Discussion/Inquiry Questions

- What would have happened if Will hadn't discovered the Coober Pedy opal fields?
- What impact might this have had on the development of opal mining in Australia and on tourism in this area?

### Content description

The reasons people migrated to Australia and the experiences and contributions of a particular migrant group within a colony ([ACHASSK109](#))

### Elaborations

- identifying the reasons why people migrated to Australia in the 1800s (for example, as convicts; assisted passengers; indentured labourers; people seeking a better life such as gold miners; and those dislocated by events such as the Industrial Revolution, the Irish Potato Famine and the Highland Clearances)
- investigating the experiences and contributions of a particular migrant group within a colony (for example, Germans in South Australia, Japanese in Broome, Afghan cameleers in the Northern Territory, Chinese at Palmer River, Pacific Islanders in the Torres Strait)
- connecting (where appropriate) stories of migration to students' own family histories

### Activity

- Research the impact of the Afghan cameleers on the exploration and development of the Australian outback (see pages 16 to 17 of *Will the Wonderkid* as a starting point).
- Create a wall poster itemising the contributions they made to life in the outback, highlighting the following areas:
  - constructing railways and buildings
  - helping explorers
  - multiculturalism

### Discussion/Inquiry Questions

- How would explorers and settlers in the outback have coped if they only had horses as their beasts of burden?

### Content description

The role that a significant individual or group played in shaping a colony ([ACHASSK110](#))

### Elaborations

- investigating the contribution or significance of an individual or group to the shaping of a colony in the 1800s (for example, explorers, farmers, pastoralists, miners, inventors, writers, artists, humanitarians, religious and spiritual leaders, political activists, including women, children, and people of diverse cultures)
- exploring the motivations and actions of an individual or group that shaped a colony

### Activity

Select one of the explorers mentioned on pages 62 to 65 of *Will the Wonderkid* and research one of their major expeditions.

- Write either a newspaper account or a 'boys-own-adventure' story about their expedition. Include information on the following:
  - where the explorers were going
  - who was in the expedition
  - what they took with them
  - how they travelled
  - what they ate

- where they found water
- what happened when they encountered Indigenous communities
- what they 'discovered'
- how they survived
- whether they made it back home
- what their expedition contributed to the development of Australia

### Discussion/Inquiry Questions

- Why did most European explorers ignore or make little use of Indigenous knowledge about how to survive in the outback and where to find water in the desert?
- What contributions did European explorers make to the development of Australia?
  - Were their contributions always positive?

## Year 5

### Content description

Evaluate evidence to draw conclusions ([ACHASSI129](#))

### Elaborations

- contemplating attitudes and actions of the past that now seem strange and unacceptable and imagining what aspects of current society may be viewed in this way in the future

### Activity

Will Hutchison and other explorers during the late 1800s and early 1900s travelled into the desert on camels and horses. In Australian society today, much of the treatment of those animals would be regarded as cruel.

- Divide the class into two groups, with one group drawing up a list of arguments in favour of using horses for exploring in the desert and the other drawing up a list of arguments against using them. Each group should select a spokesperson to present their arguments to the class.
- Ask the class to vote on the question: Should horses have been used as beasts of burden by early European explorers in outback Australia, given the desert conditions?

### Discussion/Inquiry Questions

- Was your class in favour of or against the use of horses for exploring the desert? Why did the class come to this conclusion?
- Investigate the rules and laws applying to the treatment and use of such animals in Australia today. Discuss why such laws are necessary.

## HASS—Geography

### Year 5

### Content description

The influence of people, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, on the environmental characteristics of Australian places ([ACHASSK112](#))

### Elaborations

- exploring the extent of change in the local environment over time (for example, through vegetation clearance, fencing, urban development, drainage, irrigation, farming, forest plantations or mining), and evaluating the positive and negative effects of change on environmental sustainability

### Activity

- Divide the class into small groups. Each group should select and research a plant or animal that thrives in the extreme weather conditions of the desert areas of Australia that were explored by Will Hutchison and his father. Ask each group to report their findings to the class, including the following information:
  - Is it a native or introduced plant/animal?
  - What enables it to survive in harsh desert conditions?
  - What does it feed on?
  - Where does it source water from?

### Discussion/Inquiry Questions

- How will the hotter conditions caused by global warming and climate change impact on the animals and plants that live in Australian deserts?
- What can we do to ameliorate these conditions?

### Content description

The environmental and human influences on the location and characteristics of a place and the management of spaces within them ([ACHASSK113](#))

### Elaborations

- comparing how people have responded to climatic conditions in similar and different places and explaining why most Australians live close to the coast compared to inland Australia
- examining the effects of landforms (for example, valleys, hills, natural harbours and rivers) on the location and characteristics of their place and other places they know

### Activity

The opal field that Will Hutchison discovered went on to become the mining town of Coober Pedy (see pages 96 to 99 of *Will the Wonderkid*). Research the way in which the people of Coober Pedy have lived in harsh desert conditions for over one hundred years.

- Use various forms of presentation (for example, charts, posters and brochures) to present information on:
  - living conditions
  - housing
  - food supplies
  - water supplies
  - communications
  - transport



- leisure activities
- schooling

### Discussion/Inquiry Questions

- What draws people to an isolated place like Coober Pedy, with its harsh and difficult environment? Possible points for discussion include:
  - unique lifestyle and environment
  - isolation
  - sense of adventure
  - comradery of a small community
  - multiculturalism
  - enjoyment of challenge
  - pioneering spirit
  - opportunity to be your own boss
  - chance to make a fortune

### Activity

- Plot Will's 1914 journey from Adelaide to what is now Coober Pedy on a modern map, considering:
  - what roads he would follow
  - which towns he would he travel through
  - how long the journey would take him by car.
- Choose one of the towns along the route and research its history, including:
  - when it was established
  - why it was established?
  - how big it was in 1914
  - how many people live there now
  - what is its main claim to fame.

### Discussion/Inquiry Questions

- What are the main differences between travelling in the outback in the early 1900s and travelling there now?

## HASS—Civics and Citizenship

### Year 4

#### Content description

The different cultural, religious and/or social groups to which they and others in the community belong ([ACHASSK093](#))

#### Elaborations

- identifying diversity through the different social, cultural and religious groups students belong to
- describe real, virtual or vicarious experiences with other cultures and groups

## Activity

- Based on the information in *Will the Wonderkid*, and research activities about camels and the Afghans cameleers in Australia, 'interview' an Afghan cameleer from the early 1900s, using the following questions:
  - Where and when were you born?
  - Who were your parents, and where did they come from?
  - What was your early childhood like?
  - What is your first memory of living in Australia?
  - What inspired you to become a cameleer?
  - What do you like about camels?
  - What do you dislike about camels?
  - What is the strangest thing you have carried on the back of a camel?
  - What are the most important things to know in order to survive in the desert?
  - Would you recommend children become cameleers? Why/Why not?
- Have students write a newspaper article about an Afghan cameleer based on their 'interview'.

## Discussion/Inquiry Questions

- How hard was it for cameleers to fit into Australian society in the early 1900s and survive in the Australian desert?
- Would they still have such problems today?

## Concluding Activities

### Creative Responses

- **Postcard**
  - Research the habitats and habits of one of the creatures (e.g. camels, flies, mosquitoes, geckos) from *Will the Wonderkid*.
  - Design a postcard featuring the creature.
  - Write a message on the back of the postcard to a friend or family member, telling them some interesting facts about the creature.
- **Poetry**
  - Read the poem *The Camel* at the beginning of *Will the Wonderkid*.
  - Write or illustrate a poem about your favourite creature, plant or incident in this book.
  - Combine the poems to create a class poetry book about the Australian desert.
  - Select an appropriate title for your book.
- **Story/Comic Strip/Video**
  - Write a story (or create a comic strip or a short video) about exploring the bush in the early 1900s using the basic bushcraft hints from the early 1900s, detailed on pages 46 to 47 of *Will the Wonderkid*. Cover:
    - where you are going
    - who is with you
    - how you get there

- where you camp
  - what you eat and drink
  - how you survive.
- **Travel Blog**
  - Create a map showing the major train journeys around and across Australia.
  - Select one of these railway journeys, research its history and write a travel blog, imagining that you are undertaking the journey.
- **Picture Book**
  - The collective noun for a group of camels is a caravan. Draw or paint a picture of a 'caravan of camels' for a humorous picture book on collective nouns for animals.
  - Include a couple of lines of text about your camels using alliteration and onomatopoeia.
- **Book Design**
  - Discuss the layout of the information sections in *Will the Wonderkid*.
  - Select one of the creatures, other than a camel, that features in *Will the Wonderkid*.
  - Create a double-page spread, similar to the information section on pages 30 to 33 of *Will the Wonderkid*, about your creature using images, captions, text and diagrams.
- **Portrait**
  - Select one of your favourite creatures from this book and create a portrait of it in its natural environment.
  - Use one of the following media: acrylic paint, texta, pencils, watercolour or collage.
- **Visual Literacy**
  - Many of the illustrations featured in *Will the Wonderkid* are taken from 'Boys Own Adventure' storybooks from the early 1900s. Examine the images on pages 21, 35, 48, 54, 66, 84 and 100 of the book and:
    - assign an emoji to each image to show your immediate response to it.
    - discuss how the artist has evoked that emotional response.
    - discuss how the illustrator has portrayed the emotion of the characters.
  - Create a picture of someone lost in the desert or the bush inspired by the artistic style of these artists.
- **Board Game**
  - Create a board game, similar to Snakes and Ladders, based on Will Hutchison's journey.
- **Treasure Map**
  - Create a wall map showing where gems and precious metals have been found in Australia.
  - Include images of gold, silver, opal, pearls and diamonds, and information about these treasures and where they were found.

## Further Reading

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- McLaren, Glen, *Beyond Leichhardt: Bushcraft and the Exploration of Australia*. South Fremantle, WA: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1996.
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